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ABSTRACT

Commercially developed basal reading programs are used in most elementary school classrooms in the United States. Yet often neither the publishers developing these programs nor the members of textbook adoption committees selecting programs are able to take advantage of the best available knowledge about the reading process and reading instruction. The Center for the Study of Reading's "A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs" is a major effort to make such knowledge available. The "Guide" presents current information about research and practice in reading and provides guidelines for evaluating programs. Four textbook adoption committees piloted the "Guide" and found, in general, that it contributed to a more informed selection process and led committee members to focus more attention on substantive issues associated with quality of instruction and content and give less attention to more superficial and political aspects of the programs. Four factors emerged from the evaluation of the "Guide" as contributing to its successful use: (1) committee enthusiasm and effectiveness, (2) adequate time to use the materials, (3) leadership in the textbook adoption process, and (4) inservice support from a knowledgeable source. Three pages of references and three tables are provided. (FL)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

Reading Education Report No. 68

IMPROVING BASAL READING PROGRAMS: A REPORT OF THE ADOPTION GUIDELINES PROJECT AT THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

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Abstract

Commercially developed basal reading programs are used in most elementary school classrooms in this country. Yet, often neither the publishers developing these programs, nor the members of state and local textbook adoption committees selecting programs are able to take advantage of the best available and most up-to-date knowledge about the reading process and reading instruction. The development and piloting of A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs is a major effort to make such knowledge available to publishers and members of adoption committees. The Guide presents current information about research and practice in reading, and provides guidelines for evaluating basal reading programs. Case studies of four textbook adoption committees that piloted the Guide are presented. In general, these committees found the Guide contributed to a more informed selection process, and committee members focussed more attention on substantive issues associated with the quality of instruction and content, and less attention to superficial aspects of programs and political considerations. In particular, four factors contributed to the success of the project: committee leadership and enthusiasm, adequate time to use the materials, and inservice support from a knowledgeable source. The role of this project in the larger endeavor to improve reading instruction in our elementary schools is addressed.

Improving Basal Reading Programs: A Report of the Adoption Guidelines Project at the Center for the Study of Reading

The Center for the Study of Reading's attempt to improve basal reading programs--and the textbook adoption process--is described in this paper. The Adoption Guidelines Project at the Center has been engaged in developing a series of booklets on topics important to reading instruction. The goal of the project is that the booklets in the series, A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs, will be a catalyst for change and improvement in reading instruction. This goal is premised upon the belief that members of textbook adoption committees who are more knowledgeable will not only be better at making decisions, but will demand better basal reading programs from the publishers.

In this paper we first briefly document the use of basal reading programs, discuss the improvement of these programs, and review the research about the process of textbook adoption. We then discuss how the Adoption Guidelines Project group developed the booklets--and especially how tryout of the booklets with textbook committees shaped and altered their content. We describe the booklets in their final form, and finally, we summarize case studies of the adoption process of four school districts that used the booklets.

The Use of Basal Reading Programs

The predominance of basal reading programs in American school classrooms is well documented (Austin & Morrison, 1983; Shannon, 1983; Hoffman & O'Neal, 1984; Duffy & McIntyre, 1982;

Borko, Eisenhart, Kello, & Vandett, 1984; Mason & Osborn, 1982; Durkin, 1978-79). Classroom research has established that both the content and quality of instruction in basal readers influences reading curriculum and instruction in American schools. The estimates are that 75 to 90% of the time students spend in a reading period is dominated by the content of basal reading programs (Fisher, Berliner, Filby, Marliave, Cohen, Dishaw, & Moore, 1978; Mason & Osborn, 1982). Some researchers have found that teachers follow the teachers' manuals of basal programs quite closely (Hodges, 1980; Durkin, 1983; Woodward, 1986). It is for these reasons that many scholars, including Brophy (1982) and Resnick and Resnick (1985) argue that improving basal reading programs is a necessary condition for improving reading instruction in American classrooms.

The Improvement of Basal Reading Programs

It is only during the past decade that the content and quality of basal reading programs have been extensively investigated by a number of researchers in different universities and research institutions. In an effort to communicate some of this research to the publishers of basal reading programs, the Center for the Study of Reading and the Educational Division of the Association of American Publishers have sponsored three important meetings. At these meetings, which have taken place over the past six years, executives and editors of all the major publishing houses in the United States and Canada listened to presentations of reports of research about reading. At each

meeting the emphasis was on research that had direct implications for change in basal reading programs.[1]

As the executives and editors discussed these reports (in prepared responses, panel discussions, and privately), a recurring theme emerged: the impetus for change must come not only from publishers, but also from the purchasers of basal reading programs--that is, the school districts buying programs, and most specifically, the teachers and school administrators responsible for selecting the programs. The point was made (in one form or another, over and over again) that changes in reading programs must be perceived as important and necessary by the people who buy programs; only then would most publishers be willing to take the financial risk of substantially altering programs to include procedures and ideas supported by recent research in reading.

Evolving from this theme was a challenge to the Center to communicate current reading research (as well as exemplars of good practice) to a targeted group of people: teachers, administrators, and other members of textbook adoption committees. Underlying this was the belief that a more knowledgeable market would demand--rather than reject--reading programs that contained the kinds of change advocated by researchers.

In response to this challenge, researchers at the Center began developing a series of booklets, A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs. The plan was for the booklets to describe and summarize recent research in reading and to present implications

of that research for classroom instruction--especially for the content of basal reading programs.

It was decided that researchers at the Center for the Study of Reading, as well as researchers from other institutions, would write the booklets and that teachers and school administrators would be consulted on the project. It was also decided that, as the booklets were developed, they would be tried out and evaluated by textbook adoption committees in school districts. The three authors of this paper worked as the Adoption Guidelines Project staff whose task it was to coordinate these development and tryout efforts.

The Textbook Adoption Process

Project staff first investigated what research had to say about the textbook adoption process; for example, how are committee members selected? How do they establish criteria? And how do they make decisions? Our search through the literature revealed that until recently the textbook adoption process was not studied in a systematic way. Over the last few years, however, Farr and his colleagues (Courtland, Farr, Harris, Tarr, & Treece, 1983; Farr & Tulley, 1985; Farr, Tulley, & Rayford, 1984; Powell, 1985; Tulley, 1983) have conducted a series of studies that provide some data about the textbook adoption process. While conventional wisdom suggests that committees will choose the basal program of the highest instructional quality, these researchers found that when evaluating programs, committees typically used checklists to determine instructional quality. A review of these checklists by Farr and Tulley indicates that

"most [checklists] emphasize only the existence of a particular factor rather than its quality" (Farr & Tulley, 1985, p. 470). For example, a mark on a checklist can indicate that main idea instruction is present but does not indicate the amount or quality of the instruction.

Courtland, Farr, et al. (1983) reported that the evaluation criteria employed by most reviewers in their study were based on "personal interpretations" of the general criteria that were supplied to them. They wrote:

> When asked specifically to identify the factors that caused them to select as "best" one set of textbooks, the reviewers responded with a wide variety of general information and little specificity. The researchers' general impression was that the reviewers were often looking for reasons to exclude a set of texts rather than significant reasons to adopt one textbook series (p. 76).

An item analysis of basal reading evaluation forms and checklists gathered from 26 school systems in 14 states (Comas, 1983) revealed few items that require committee members to document or substantiate in a quantifiable form any of their conclusions about a program.

We began our own collection of checklists and rating forms. As we examined them, we concluded that the very nature of these lists and forms precluded objectivity: answering yes/no questions about sufficient review, or rating on a scale from

1 to 5, how well teachers' guides are organized, are measures that will yield biased, rather than objective, responses.

In addition, the lack of representation of research-based criteria on the forms and lists was evident. They typically contained more items about the physical features of textbooks than about more substantive topics such as specific content, prose style in readers, pedagogy, and instructional design in teachers' guides. And, in fact, the Comas item analysis of evaluation forms revealed that only 34.6% of the districts sampled included research questions of any kind on their evaluation forms, as compared to 73.1% that included items about illustrations.

After reviewing research on the textbook adoption process, we determined a major goal of the project: to help textbook adoption committees focus on the content of basal reading programs and the quality of instruction. We hoped the booklets would (a) help textbook adoption committees understand the issues involved in effective reading instruction, (b) describe what committees should look for when evaluating the content of basal reading programs, and (c) provide a procedure that would help committees both to effectively analyze the content of programs and to record their findings. We also hoped the booklets would provide textbook adoption committees with knowledge with which they could make a case to their publishers for improved reading programs.

Development of the Booklets

From the beginning, the project staff worked with textbook adoption committees. Committee members indicated they wanted current information about effective reading instruction. They also expressed a need for precise ways of examining basal programs in order to find out how instruction was handled in different programs. It seemed that traditional checklists were not enough, information about research and practice was not enough, and even guidelines were not enough. One reading coordinator of a fairly large school district summed up the requests of the teachers in her district: "Tell me how I should go about looking for these things in the programs I evaluate."

Such requests guided the initial efforts. Our hope was that committee members would read and make use of the information in the booklets. Two questions predominated: (a) What information would committee members find most useful? and (b) How should the information be presented? We were uncertain about how the booklets would look or what to do to help adoption committees examine programs. We realized that the booklets could not be too lengthy and that they should not be laden with research jargon. We also realized that they had to include evaluation procedures more substantive than the typical checklists and rating forms.

These ideas directed the writing of early drafts of the booklets, which were then tested with several adoption committees. These early drafts had many problems: They were too long, too difficult, and full of jargon. The committees found the evaluation procedures cumbersome and confusing. Some of the

problems the staff encountered and the solutions to these problems are discussed below.

Booklet length. A member of one adoption committee requested that each topic be summarized on one 8 1/2 by 11 inch piece of paper. In contrast, Project staff envisioned short, five-page pamphlets on a number of important topics. The early drafts, however, were from 25 to 30 pages in length. In their concerns for completeness, Center staff members working on the booklets were reluctant to shorten these drafts. Pilot tests showed that these 25-page booklets were not very successful. For example, members of two different committees agreed to read two booklets; yet a month later many of the booklets were returned unopened. Center staff members responded to this real-world test by cutting the length of the booklets to about 15 pages.

Booklet format. Members of the editorial staffs of some basal publishing houses who reviewed the booklets, as well as committee members, found the format of the early drafts difficult to follow. These complaints led to a major rearrangement and reorganization of the information in the booklets.

Amount of work. Members of several committees commented on the inordinate amount of work involved in using early drafts of the booklets and especially the evaluation procedures. One committee read one booklet and, instead of using the booklet's procedures, made up its own checklist. Another committee decided against using the booklets and, instead, used copyright dates of the programs it was examining to make their initial selection. Still another committee resorted to the "flip test." Such real

world tests prompted Project staff to revise the procedures and reduce considerably the amount of time needed to complete them.

Content of booklets. Committee members were especially helpful in focusing Project staff on teachers' concerns. Where possible, these concerns were addressed in the booklets. For example: How many vocabulary words should be taught before a selection is read? What kind of questions should be asked about a selection? Sometimes the staff decided the booklets could not address teachers' concerns simply because there was not enough information available to make statements about the value of an activity or topic, or even to make an argument about usefulness of the activity. For example, to the question "Should skill teaching appear in the student textbook?," there is no good answer.

Evaluation procedures. One of the most controversial aspects of the booklets was the inclusion of procedures for evaluating the treatment of different topics in reading programs. Many of the consultants to the project from research institutions said that it was sufficient to present information about current research and practice in reading, and that the development of evaluation procedures was beyond the scope of the Project.

Textbook adoption committees, however, strongly disagreed. In fact, every adoption committee we worked with advised us to include evaluation procedures. Otherwise, they said, the booklets would not be used. Committees wanted simple directions for what to look for, and advice for how to evaluate what they found. The procedures in early drafts of the booklets were

cumbersome and lengthy. Eventually, after much trial and error, procedures were devised that permitted committees to examine instruction in the programs they were evaluating and to systematically record their comments on worksheets.

In summary, we are convinced that the information we obtained from the textbook adoption committees using the various versions of the booklets is important. These experiences also impressed us with the difficulty of our task. Project staff tried to find a middle line between general and specific information and between too much information and not enough. The content and organization of each booklet was changed over and over again. Quite literally, dozens of drafts were tried out with different textbook adoption committees for over a year.

We became convinced that committees were not willing to read lengthy, theoretical essays about the reading process. Rather, they wanted concise information about current research and practice and then assistance in applying that information to basal program evaluation. We found that while committee members were often desperate for help in learning how to evaluate textbooks, they wanted a specific kind of help.

The content and organization of the final versions of the booklets are the result of these efforts. They are described in the next section.

Description of the Booklets

A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs consists of seven booklets and a Leader's Manual. Each booklet discusses a specific topic important to reading instruction:

- Beginning Reading and Decoding Skills--issues related to early reading (K-2) and decoding skills such as phonics, contextual analysis, structural analysis, and syllabication.
- Selection in the Reader--the content, quality, and difficulty level of the student readers. Issues related to the readability of textbooks are also discussed here.
- Comprehension I: The Guided Reading Lesson--what the teacher does to guide students' reading in the student readers. The booklet examines in detail the guided reading lessons that are provided in the teachers' manuals of basal reading programs.
- Comprehension II: Skills and Strategies--comprehension skill instruction. This booklet discusses important new research about improving students' comprehension abilities and also addresses some age-old issues and dilemmas about comprehension skill instruction.
- Workbooks--the quality of instruction included in workbooks, worksheets, ditto masters, and other workbook type materials. The booklet discusses how workbooks are used in classrooms and shows how to analyze the content and format of workbooks.
- Assessment, Management, and Software--the tests, management systems, and software that are included in many basals. The booklet presents research about assessment issues and discusses how to evaluate management systems and software.

Each booklet is divided into four sections. The first section (Research and Practice) discusses current research and practice about the booklet's topic. The second section (Guidelines) lists the guidelines that emerge from the research and practice section. The third section (Procedures) contains directions for using the worksheets to record comments and evaluations. The last section (References) supplies references for further reading and study (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here.

The Vocabulary Booklet was developed first and served as a prototype for the rest of the booklets. We will describe this booklet in detail to give a sense of the organization and content of all of the booklets.

The Vocabulary Booklet

In the research and practice section of the Vocabulary Booklet, textbook evaluators are provided with summaries of current research about vocabulary acquisition and instruction. The section begins with a general introduction to issues in vocabulary acquisition. Evaluators are reminded that knowing the meanings of words is not an all-or-none situation, and that there are different levels of word knowledge. Research is presented to demonstrate, for example, that it takes extensive word knowledge to improve reading comprehension and that having a limited knowledge of a word (such as knowing its definition) is not likely to improve comprehension. It is established that

vocabulary instruction must lead to extensive word knowledge if it is to affect reading comprehension.

Three major approaches to the teaching of vocabulary in basal reading programs are described and evaluated: definitional, contextual, and conceptual. How each approach can lead to different levels of word knowledge and affect comprehension is discussed, and examples of more and less effective instruction are provided.

As each approach is explained, a guideline is presented. For example, a guideline about what to look for when evaluating the contextual approach follows a discussion of that approach:

> When a basal program uses a contextual approach, look for:
>
> - instructional contexts in which sentences provide enough context clues for students to accurately figure out the meanings of words.

Following the research and practice section is a list of all the guidelines that appear in the research and practice section. See Table 2 for the Vocabulary Guidelines.

Insert Table 2 about here.

The procedures follow the guidelines, which show evaluators how to determine how well the guidelines are met in a program. Evaluators record their findings on a worksheet. The Vocabulary Worksheet (see Table 3) provides space for comments on the vocabulary activities in a given lesson. Evaluators analyze which approaches the program uses and, for each approach, make a judgment about the quality of the instruction. For example, when

a program uses a contextual approach, evaluators must ask, "Do the sentences provide enough context clues for students to figure out the meanings of words?" Comments are recorded in the appropriate spaces; additional space is provided for ratings.

Insert Table 3 about here.

The Effectiveness of the Booklets

The examination of basal reading programs is part of a larger textbook adoption process. Farr and his associates (Farr & Tully, 1985; Powell, 1985) describe textbook adoption as a dynamic group process that has its own rules, agenda, and organizational structure. The piloting of our booklets demonstrated to us that the dynamics of the process influenced the extent to which the booklets were used by textbook adoption committees.

Center staff followed four adoption committees that used the final version of the booklets to help them select basal reading programs. Data were collected from observations, audiotapes, questionnaires, and interviews with committee members. The focus of the present discussion is on the question: Under what conditions will the booklets work? That is, under what conditions will the booklets help adoption committees evaluate the content and instructional quality of basal reading programs. Complete data are not presented here (see Dole, Rogers, & Osborn, in preparation). Instead, our purpose is to summarize our

experiences and identify some issues that we think need further exploration and study.

A Description of the Pilot Sites

Site A. The first textbook adoption site studied was located in a suburb of a major city in the Midwest. The adoption committee consisted of seven teachers representing each of the seven schools in the district and was led by the reading coordinator of the district.

The Site A Committee used the booklets to choose a basal program from among the three series that had already survived several cuts. Committee members broke into groups of three. Each group read one booklet (either the Vocabulary, Workbook or Comprehension I booklet). The groups then met with the Adoption Guidelines Project staff, who showed them how to use the worksheets. Group members worked individually and also met periodically. When the groups completed their work, the committee met as a whole. Each group presented an oral report summarizing how the topic of its booklet was handled in each of the three programs. Then the entire committee rated and ranked each program on each of the booklet topics.

Site B. The second textbook adoption site studied was located in a western agricultural town. This school district viewed the textbook adoption process as part of a larger change effort to improve reading instruction. The district had embarked on a year-long staff development program that was coordinated with choosing a new basal reading program. A group of 50

district personnel (including a principal and a teacher from each school in the district) participated in this effort.

From among those principals and teachers, seven were chosen as team leaders to help train and work with the rest of the group. The Adoption Guidelines Project staff trained this smaller group in the use of the booklets; then they led the rest of the committee members through the evaluation process. The committee broke into small groups; each group evaluated the three topics in several basal reading programs.

The committee has completed its evaluation of vocabulary, comprehension instruction, and the workbooks in the basal programs they are considering. At the time this article is being written, the committee is still in the process of evaluating other topics.

Site C. Adoption committee C was located in a small Midwestern town. In September, eighteen committee members were given the booklets which they used individually as they piloted five different reading programs. Each of the committee members piloted two programs with two different reading groups. Monthly meetings were scheduled and committee members met by grade levels to compare notes and to come up with evaluations and ratings of each topic for each program based on the worksheets and on the piloting. In January a decision was made. Two basals were chosen with an option for one school to use a third.

Site D. The final pilot site was located in a small town in the Midwest. The committee consisted of 25 volunteer teachers from the district and was led by the district reading

coordinator. This district took six months to complete the adoption process, and, like Site C, used the three Adoption Guidelines Booklets to evaluate the series they were simultaneously piloting.

This adoption committee, like the Committee at Site C, did not have any training from Project staff as committee members evaluated the program. But, unlike Committee C, the Site D leader had no support or assistance from Center staff. The booklets were sent to the committee which met as a group with their leader to complete the worksheets together.

Discussion of the Four Sites

A comparison and contrast of the four sites raises interesting issues concerning the effectiveness of the Adoption Guidelines Booklets. One goal of the project was to help committee members focus on the content and instructional quality of basal reading programs. Our observations and audiotapes of committee meetings indicated that the four committees looked at programs in considerable detail. Teachers at all sites completed lengthy written evaluations on the worksheets and gave very specific examples from basal programs to support their findings and conclusions.

Field notes from observations of committee meetings illustrate how the booklets helped adoption committees focus on the instructional content and quality of basal programs:

From Site B evaluating vocabulary instruction:

Committee Member: This text uses a conceptual approach, but it is not labeled. The text is dependent upon the teacher. I would like to see more in the manual for those teachers who don't add information if they don't know it. What will only be taught is what is in the manual.

Project Staff: Can you give me an example?

Committee Member: Plant. One second-grade story is about a plant [a factory] . . . Plant is later discussed in comprehension, but not directly. Children are not introduced to the concept of a plant as a factory, though that's what the story is about.

From Site A evaluating comprehension instruction:

Committee Member: These are not good questions. They are wide open, too general. The whole series of questions are never clarified; there's a whole barrage of questions to ask and no directions for teachers.

From Site C evaluating workbooks:

Committee Member: The language used in the textbook is also used in the workbook. Students know what they are to do and why they are to do it. Directions are clear and enable students to do the workbook (page) independently. The pictures are precise and realistic . . . directly related to the task . . . uses a variety of response forms . . . very clear instructional language.

An incident at Site A points out nicely that some committee members need assistance before they can begin to critically evaluate the quality of the instruction in basal reading programs. The committee members' hesitation to find fault could well reflect Shannon's (1983) assertion of the "reification of the basal." That is, teachers believe that the basal is "Bible," and that they are not in a position to evaluate the quality of

the instruction in a basal reading program. During one session, a member of the Project staff found that teachers who were evaluating comprehension instruction were baffled as they read over 30 questions following a lesson they were evaluating.

Project staff: What seems to be the problem?

Committee Member: This lesson has over 30 questions about the story. But the comprehension worksheet for the Comprehension Booklet has space for only 12 questions.

Project staff: Well, what do you think about having 30 questions for one story?

(No response. Committee Member 1 looks at Committee Member 2. Committee Member 2 looks back at Committee Member 1 and shrugs her shoulders).

Project staff: Is that good or bad?

(No response.)

Project staff: Well, take a look at this story. If you were teaching this story to your kids, would you ask all of these questions?

Committee Member 1: Well, no, I wouldn't. There are too many questions to ask kids. It would ruin the story for them.

Project staff: OK. So now what do you think of this program's handling of questions for this grade level? Do they do a good job or not?

Committee Member 1: Well, no, I guess they don't.

Project staff: Do you think your own questions would be better in this particular case?

Committee Member 2: Yes, I guess so. But I never would think to question the way the basal would do it.

Project staff: Well, now you see that you can and you should. Now you need to see if this is a particular pattern that runs through this whole basal program. If so, then you've made an evaluation about the way one basal handles comprehension questions.

The Project staff member followed this group's progress for the next hour. During that time the group evaluated three additional lessons in the same basal program and then two lessons in another program. Their conversation was lively and animated. They decided that the second program did a better job of asking questions than did the first program. But they also agreed that neither program provided the questions that they would like to use.

In this paper we present only a partial analysis of the observations, audiotapes, questionnaires, and interview data we collected; however, two general impressions predominate. First, the booklets "took the guesswork" out of evaluating basal programs. One teacher said, "In the past there has been too much, 'I feel,' which is totally subjective." Another teacher said, "Previous attempts at adoption centered around debate based on opinion and who screamed loudest. This time it has been systematic, factual debate." The leader at Site A reported that her committee "could evaluate basals thoroughly. They knew the programs inside out when they were done. They quantified their evaluations and justified their responses." Leaders at each of the sites corroborated these general feelings.

Our second impression was that after committee members completed their evaluations, they found that no basal program really matched the quality of instruction that they had been looking for. The following remarks are sobering:

- The booklets gave us an opportunity to look closely at the programs we were evaluating. In the end, we chose the best of the worst.

And another:

- It's disappointing to do all this work and then find that there are not really any good programs out there.

The leader from Site A reported:

- The tendency is to see all basals as poor after they go through the process--like the adolescent who finds out his parents are not perfect . . .

Such comments made it clear to us that the committees felt that the basal programs could not match the high instructional standards set by the booklet guidelines. And, because the basal programs fell short of their expectations, committee members saw the need for staff development once the adoption process was complete. "In the end, in-servicing becomes important," said one committee member. The leader at Site B reported, "My teachers said to me, 'How do I tell other teachers this'?"

Factors That Lead to the Booklets' Effectiveness

We have ample evidence that committees at all four sites did, in fact, carefully evaluate the instructional quality of the basal programs they examined. Data from the sites indicated that committee members spent considerable time examining programs and that their final choices reflected their best judgments about the quality of instruction in those programs.

Nevertheless, our observations do not lead us to believe that the booklets will be used successfully by all adoption committees. On the whole, reactions from committees at Sites A, B, and D were positive: Committee members felt that the booklets

helped them evaluate instructional quality and thus to do a better job of selecting programs for their districts. Committee members at Site C, however, had mixed reactions to the booklets and to their usefulness in helping them select a basal program. Data from these four sites have led us to speculate about factors that influence the effectiveness of the booklets. These factors are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Time. Many committee members commented on the enormous amount of time involved in using the booklets. The committee at Site A agreed that because of the time factor, the process was "not for everyone." Time had come up as an important factor influencing the decisions of other adoption committees (Farr & Tulley, 1985). Courtland et al. (1983) found that a major concern of the adoption committee they studied was that committee members perceived themselves as not having enough time to review the materials adequately.

Another aspect of time was the presence or absence of release time. Committees at Sites A, B, and D were given release time to work on their committees. Site C received no release time, and, as one teacher reported, they were "expected to volunteer."

Enthusiastic committee members. Committee members at Site A also commented on the importance of an interested, enthusiastic committee. They said that such a committee would be needed to sustain the time and effort involved in looking closely at basal reading programs. This committee appeared to have that enthusiasm. At least three of the members were involved in

graduate classes in reading, and the leader reported that they all "enthusiastically" volunteered for this adoption committee assignment. Committee members at Site B were by and large an enthusiastic group as well. Most teachers were "hand-picked" by their principals as master teachers. The subgroup of seven leaders had been chosen because of their leadership abilities and their enthusiasm for the reading inservices provided by Project staff.

On the other hand, the Site C committee did not appear to be as interested and enthusiastic as the other committees. This was evidenced by their arriving late to after-school meetings, lack of questions, inattentive behavior during sessions, and failure to complete our questionnaires.

Inservice. Committees at Sites A and B had extensive inservice training in reading, along with training in the use of the booklets. Individual interviews with members of both committees indicated that it was their combined knowledge about reading instruction, rather than knowledge gained from the booklets alone, that led to their understanding of the material and their ability to use the booklets to evaluate basal programs. When Project staff interviewed individual committee members about their current thinking about the use of basal programs, they all reported changing something in their teaching or their use of basal programs. But, they all pointed to graduate classes, readings, or inservice training, as well as the booklets, as sources of their current thinking.

On the other hand, the Site C committee had no related inservice training or readings and no assistance in how to use the booklets. As a matter of fact, this committee did not work together at all. They were given the booklets, told to read them, and then to use them to evaluate the programs they were piloting on an individual basis.

Committee D did not have any Project staff assistance either, but they did have a knowledgeable leader who knew reading research and practice, and who provided additional readings and assistance to the committee.

Leadership. An additional factor that seems to strongly influence the perceived usefulness of the booklets is the kind and quality of the leadership available throughout the textbook adoption process. Committees A and D had knowledgeable reading coordinators taking strong leadership roles in the adoption process. They were decisive in assigning duties and deadlines, and they were able to answer questions about reading content. And when an issue needed clarification, they were able to give it.

Committee B also had a strong leader. Although he was not knowledgeable about reading, he utilized the services of Project staff to provide that leadership role for the adoption committee. So, when committee members needed clarification about the use or content of the booklets, Project staff were there to help.

A change of leadership midstream caused organizational problems for committee C, and neither leader was perceived as particularly effective. As one committee member commented, "[the

first leader] was very opinionated and [the second leader] was a nice person but not demanding."

Summary, Conclusions and Caveats

The goal of the Adoption Guidelines Project is the improvement of basal reading programs. The focus of this article has been on materials and development to help textbook adoption committees evaluate the instructional quality of these programs. We described the development of the Adoption Guidelines booklets and discussed data collected to determine if the booklets were useful. We have preliminary evidence to suggest that, under certain conditions, the booklets are quite effective in helping adoption committees evaluate the content and instructional quality of basal reading programs.

We identified four factors that seemed to influence the use of the booklets: time, enthusiasm, inservice training, and effective leadership. Whether any or all of these factors is necessary and/or sufficient is a question for further study. Other questions remain as well. For example, how will the booklets fit into the total textbook adoption process?

Powell (1985) identifies five categories of factors that influenced the selection decision in the adoption committee she interviewed: (a) politics--the personalities of the people on the committee; (b) publishers--the publishers' representatives who give presentations about their programs; (c) pilot tryouts--the length and quality of the pilot studies; (d) processes--the organization and group process of the committee; and (e) pedagogy--the feelings of the committee members about reading,

and about current and local educational trends. It is interesting to speculate about how the use of the booklets fit into these categories.

(a) Will use of the booklets influence the politics of the committee? At two sites, comments were made by committee members indicating that with the booklets the evaluations became less "subjective."

(b) What effect will the booklets have on publishers? Although several committee members suggested that the booklets should be read by all publishers and their representatives, we have no data on this topic.

(c) How will the booklets interact with pilot tryouts? We have some evidence to suggest that members of two committees perceived the combined use of piloting and the booklets as being helpful.

(d) Will the booklets affect the textbook adoption process itself? The booklets provided additional structure for committees. We observed that some committees particularly appreciated the structure built into the booklets, but we do not know to what extent this structure will be used.

(e) Do the booklets affect the amount of emphasis on pedagogical factors in adoption committees' decisions? We have some evidence that the booklets helped committees to focus on the instructional quality of basal programs in a way that was not possible with checklists. One of the most consistently heard comments made by committee members was that the guidelines gave

specifics to look for in evaluating each program. One teacher said, "I wouldn't have known where to begin on my own."

A more global question remains. What place do the Adoption Guidelines Booklets have as an agent for improving the quality of reading instruction? Most committee members who used the booklets reported that they became more knowledgeable about reading instruction. They also reported that they became more aware of the importance of the new knowledge for themselves and for their colleagues. And, as they realized the inadequacies of basal programs they became aware of the need for more inservice training and staff development in their schools.

Finally, will the Adoption Guidelines Project play a role in improving the quality of instruction in basal reading programs? The data from our four sites suggest that the committees perceived the booklets as useful, and that the booklets contributed to their knowledge about reading. How and if this knowledge will be conveyed to publishers will be the topic of another study (and our next paper). Our sense is that the teachers on the committees in our study became not only more knowledgeable, but also showed signs of becoming more demanding. Our hope is that this will lead publishers to attend to the issues raised in the booklets.

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Footnote

[1]The reports of the first meeting are contained in the book, Learning to Reading in American Schools, edited by Anderson, Osborn and Tierney. A second book, Reading Education: Foundations for a Literate America, edited by Osborn, Wilson, and Anderson also contains a number of articles that pertain to basal reading programs.

Table 1

The Organization of the Booklets

Title of Section	What You Will Find in the Section	How You Can Use The Section
Research and Practice	-discussion of important background information about the topic of the booklet. -current thinking drawn from theory and research -instructional implications for basal reading programs.	-to develop an understanding of how the topic is typically treated in basal reading programs. -to learn about current research and thinking on the topic.
Guidelines	-statements telling what to look for when evaluating the topic.	-to get a quick overview of the most important information in the booklet.
Worksheets	-worksheets with specific directions for how to evaluate the topic.	-to obtain specific guidance for evaluating the content and quality of the topic in teacher's manuals, textbooks, and workbooks.
References	-references for original studies and additional reading on the topic.	-to find out more about the topic.

Table 2

GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

1. When a basal program uses a definitional approach, look for: (see page 7)

   - words that name known concepts, or
   - words that are easy to define
   - words students are likely to be familiar with used in the definitions; and sometimes
   - example sentences, and
   - specific suggestions for discussing definitions

2. When a basal program uses a contextual approach, look for:

   - instructional contexts: in which sentences contain information that permits only accurate interpretations of unknown words. (see page 8)
   - natural contexts: in which specific guidance is given to teachers for helping students derive word meanings. (see page 9)

3. When a basal program uses a conceptual approach, look for: (see page 12)

   - words that are crucial to an understanding of the selection
   - instruction that establishes ties between new and related words, and what students already know
   - instruction that utilizes new words in a variety of sentences and selections

4. Look for the extent to which particularly useful words are maintained across lessons. (see page 13)

5. Look for vocabulary instruction word lists that contain reasonable choices for the students using the program. (see page 14)

6. Look for clear directions to teachers, clear instructions to students and sufficient information in the manual for teaching the lesson.

Table 3

VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION
WORKSHEET

Publisher: _____ Grade Level: _____ Program: _____ Copyright: _____ Lesson: _____ Evaluator: _____

GUIDELINES 4, 5 MAINTENANCE AND CHOICE

TARGET LESSON					PRIOR LESSON	FOLLOW-UP LESSON	Rating:
Initial Reading	Key Words	Teacher Manual Words	Overlapping Words	Workbook/Skill Sheets			
pp. _____		pp. _____		pp. _____			

GUIDELINES 1, 2, 3 APPROACHES TO INSTRUCTION

Approach	Which words are introduced through this approach?	Comments on Activities Teacher's Manual	Comments on Activities/Workbook/ Skill Sheets/Masters	Rating:
definitional				
instructional context				
natural context				
conceptual				
mixed				
are there other activities?				
no specific instruction				

GUIDELINE 6 DIRECTIONS

Clear directions to teachers, instruction to students, sufficient information to teach the lesson?	Comments:

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